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The Darker Sides of the *Isekai* Genre:
An Examination of the Power of *Anime* and *Manga*

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Abstract

This study illustrates characteristics of the *isekai* genre, presents connections between this genre and social problems commonly found in Japanese culture and society, and demonstrates the widespread impact of Japanese popular media. By analyzing some of the most popular forms and categories of *isekai*, this research pinpoints important characteristics – in the form of certain themes, characters, and plots – that contribute to social problems like suicide and shut-ins. Escapism is a central theme in many *isekai* works, and while escapism is healthy to a certain extent, some take the concept too far, often getting lost in their own fantasies. The genre's character types are also uniquely Japanese, making it easy for the Japanese audience to project themselves in the shoes of fictional characters. Overall, qualities like these demonstrate the power that Japanese *anime* and *manga* have to reveal complex inner feelings that members of the Japanese society harbors. Although there are positive effects we can attribute to the Japanese media industry, these significant negative effects need further examination, so that issues can be addressed at individual and societal levels. Through an analysis of primary source material in the genre along with quantitative data, this project shows the deeper personal, cultural, and social implications of *isekai*.

Keywords: isekai (another world), escapism, projection, nationalism, suicide, isolation, Japanese popular media (anime, manga, light novels)

Imagine that you're walking back home after a long day. In addition to a full workday, you put in several hours of mentally exhausting overtime. While walking to the train station, in the freezing cold, you hope to catch the last train of the night. You glance at those walking beside you and notice that they have the same empty eyes that you do. They carry briefcases full of important documents, which they are going to review once they get home, along with a plastic bag containing takeout meals from nearby convenience stores or restaurants. You're in the exact same situation: you will go back to your apartment where no one is waiting for you, quickly eat, shower, sleep, and do it all over again the next day. It's a tough and unsatisfying way of life, and you wonder, *Is this ever going to end?* A sudden wave of dizziness hits you, causing you to stumble. You trip into the open road, a truck coming full speed right towards you, and you close your eyes. When you open them, you find yourself surrounded by gigantic trees you have never seen before. An unfamiliar animal scurries away from you, causing you to regain your senses. You know it in your mind and your heart. You've finally escaped the concrete jungle that was holding you captive to a mundane life. You're in a new world with new rules where you can begin anew. This is what's called *isekai*.

The *isekai* genre is just one small drop in the pond of Japanese *anime*, *manga*, and culture. Ever since the late twentieth century with the success of series like *Astro Boy* or *Akira*, Japan has slowly transformed its own image into a cultural exporter on a global scale. The popularity of Japanese *anime* and *manga* has taken the world by storm, resulting in an increased awareness of Japan's global influence. Although Japanese *anime* and *manga* were once widely accepted as mere cartoons meant only for children in mainstream American culture, a larger number of consumers now understand that they can showcase deep and intellectual stories. Those who believe that Japanese *anime* and *manga* were or are devoid of any intellectual themes,

make the mistaken assumption that these works are undeserving of scholarly research. Ian Terry provides important insight into the reasons why Americans were originally so opposed to the idea of *anime*, which include the incorporation of extensive violence and sexuality.¹ However, with the spread of globalization, it is safe to say that the Japanese visual media industry acts as an ambassador and gateway to Japan, sharing the country's culture and thoughts with the rest of the world. This form of "soft power" has changed the overall perception of Japan in the eyes of Americans and the rest of the world. As a result of this "soft power," new forms of animation, both beneficial and harmful, have emerged in both Japan and the rest of the world.

Since 2012, one particular genre has stood out in the *anime* and *manga* world: the *isekai* genre. *Isekai* 異世界 (lit. "different world") has recently gained incredible steam in the *anime* and *manga* world. Like with any other modern art form, Japanese literature, *anime* アニメ (lit. "animation"), and *manga* 漫画 (lit. "comics") have gone through different phases ever since their respective inceptions. For example, although *anime* was a medium for wartime propaganda in the 1940s with series like *Momotaro's Sea Eagles* and *Momotaro's Divine Ocean*, it soon became an important source of entertainment for Japanese culture. Like many other popular culture works, certain genres defined a generation in the history of Japanese *anime* and *manga*. The 1970s saw the rise of the "space opera" genre as well as a focus on *mecha* メカ (lit. "robots/machines").² Following that, genres like sports, martial arts, magical girl³, video game-inspired, romantic comedy, and slice-of-life all had their time in the spotlight. Before *isekai*

¹ Ian Terry. "The American Perception of Anime: Blood, Legs, and Language." *The Artifice*.

² Notable examples of these were *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) and *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979). These series had grand and dramatic stories that took place in space or on other planets.

³ These series focused on adolescent girls who gain magical powers, allowing them to transform and fight evil. One of the most popular examples is *Sailor Moon* (1992).

became so popular, one of the more influential genres was the “battle academy/school” genre.⁴ Even though there have been various genres in the history of *anime* and *manga*, they have generally been confined within their own set of rules, leaving less room for their creators to experiment. The *isekai* genre, however, is special in that the genre has no trouble juggling multiple genres at one time. The genre focuses on ordinary characters, usually Japanese high school students or salarymen and career women, who get transported to a new world with fantasy and game elements.⁵ Think *Alice in Wonderland*, but in a modern Japanese setting.

This topic is timely and important because Japanese anime and manga is a lucrative genre with deep cultural, social, and artistic implications. Its power is multifaceted and complex. On the positive side, the author has complete freedom with whatever world they decide to create, which means that no two stories are exactly alike. Moreover, *isekai* is easily accessible to those of different backgrounds, resulting in stories that are both easy to relate to and also easy to consume. With its heavy ties to escapism and appeal to the common people, *isekai* dictates what people might believe and blurs the lines between fantasy and reality.

In order to understand the impact of *isekai*, it is important to look at significant scholarly discourse. Christopher Bolton’s *Interpreting Anime* is an extremely important book in the current era where so many different *isekai* series are being produced. As with any media, Japanese *anime*, *manga*, and light novels cover an assortment of material and themes. As a result, being able to properly understand and interpret the ideas presented in Japanese media is extremely important. This thought holds true for the *isekai* genre as well, which can act as a window into

⁴ This genre would focus on an otherworldly school whose main goal was to teach students how to use magic or fight with swords, resulting in a mix of action-adventure and school life that made it popular among young teens.

⁵ The “salaryman” and “career woman” are special Japanese terms that refer to types of white-collar workers commonly seen in Japanese society. These are specific cultural terms, and I wanted to make that distinction clear.

Japanese society and culture. In my view, Bolton's argument that *anime* has the power to manipulate audiences is the most insightful in explaining why the *isekai* genre is so popular. Using Bolton's stance, we can assert that popular media is powerful because it reveals subconscious desires that one may not even know about. Since many *isekai* protagonists typically struggle with life, in the form of overwork or unsatisfying relationships, a majority of the audience can instantly relate with characters. It heightens the audience's awareness of their own problems because the audience has someone to relate to. Examining these ideas, Bolton explores his research questions that ask of "what are *anime*'s particular powers and what are its blind spots? Ultimately, what can *anime* do that other media cannot?"⁶ Once the audience sees that the protagonists can also find happiness in a new world, their desire for escapism intensifies, sometimes to unhealthy levels. The main takeaway is that the predominant Japanese visual media has the power to dictate what the audience believes in, making it a scary medium for the modern audience. Since *isekai* is so transformative and malleable, audiences can find whichever story that suits their personal interests and needs. Qualities like these seem to suggest that *isekai* is a revolutionary genre that has the power to satisfy millions.

Unfortunately, it might be acknowledged that serious underlying problems accompany this genre. The presence of light also means the presence of darkness. Light and dark are opposite sides on the same coin and the *isekai* genre has much more darkness than one might initially believe. Ever since the early 2010s, more and more authors have been writing *isekai* stories, which are flooding the industry with an overabundance of malleable and imitable plots. One issue is that for authors, stories that draw upon tropes from *isekai* are an easy way to gain recognition and get published. However, this stifles artistic innovation because authors are aware

⁶ Christopher Bolton. *Interpreting Anime*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 6.

that *isekai* stories are an easier way to appeal to the masses. In fact, in 2017, Kadokawa⁷ banned *isekai* stories from their own light-novel contest because they wanted more variety in the submissions.⁸ Another more disturbing problem is that *isekai* has become so popular because many in Japan, and even the world, can relate to the problems that the protagonists face to an unhealthy extent. Furthermore, the genre allows some who are unhappy with their current lives to, instead of facing reality, want to escape to a different world. In these new worlds, they can become someone who is seemingly “special” and live a “happier” life.

Thus, it is important to ask why this genre is so popular and what the world can extrapolate from this intense popularity. In particular, my research questions focus on the cultural and psychological impact of the *isekai* genre.

- 1) What features of *isekai* lead the audience to disconnect from reality?
- 2) What are the positives/negatives of escapism as a result of *isekai* and are there deeper implications we can extrapolate?
- 3) Finally, to what extent can Japanese *anime* and *manga* act as a lens into modern Japanese society?

In order to address these questions, I will first do a deep analysis on what I propose are the four most important subcategories of the *isekai* genre. By examining the characteristics and traits of *isekai*, this research demonstrates an understanding of how this genre works and its area of focus.

⁷ A Japanese manga and novel publishing company.

⁸ Casey Baseel. “Anime-style Novel Contest in Japan Bans Alternate Reality Stories and Teen Protagonists,” *Soranews 24*, last modified May 22, 2017, accessed May 10, 2017. <https://soranews24.com/2017/05/22/anime-style-novel-contest-in-japan-bans-alternate-reality-stories-and-teen-protagonists/>.

These different styles of *isekai* are not mutually exclusive from one another overlaps in both content and style. Establishing the genre will allow me to properly highlight the problems of this genre and its connections to the worries and anxieties that Japan is currently facing. Ultimately, this project uncovers how and why anime and *manga* are the perfect mediums to showcase the strengths and weaknesses of modern Japanese culture and society.

“Standard” *Isekai*

This classification of *isekai* is what some consider the “cookie-cutter” format that most early works adopted. Many of the works discussed in future sections draw inspiration from this mold and branch out in different directions, demonstrating the strength of this category. In addition, this is the most popular and abundant style of *isekai*, with numerous characteristics that define it. For one, these works are heavily inspired by video games. As a result, they have many similarities and references to video game mechanics and items, giving a sense of familiarity to many viewers. This trait also helps the readability of the genre, as many protagonists can access a “menu” where all their numerical stats like strength, intellect, and luck can be viewed. This helps readers instantly know who the character is and gauge how strong they currently are. Another characteristic is that the main protagonists have a specific goal in mind. This might include defeating the ultimate evil, which is usually a demon king in some shape or form, or saving the world. The final characteristic, which also extends to the other categories of *isekai*, is that the main protagonists have a special and often overpowering ability or skill that only they can use. These might be abilities that they discovered on their own or were given to them by a god or goddess in the new world. However, this trait is a double-edged sword that explains one of the bigger problems of the genre. Possessing a special ability that sets one apart from the pack

sounds great and is definitely one of the positive reasons why this style of *isekai* is so popular. But can this attitude be taken too far and possibly to an unhealthy degree? The answer is yes. Imagine you are now in your living room, floating away from the bustle of the traffic outside your window, the boss who yelled at you at work, the truck that just missed hitting you. Certain viewers, like you, detach from reality and get lost in the characters. Examining this concept throughout this essay will be critical to highlighting the problem of these commonly found genre traits.

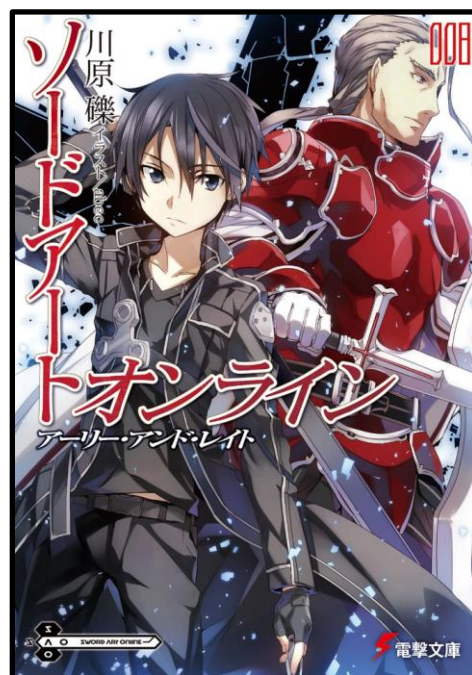
The *isekai* genre is so closely linked to video game culture likely due to the influence of one particular work. Kawahara's *Sword Art Online* is arguably one of the most influential light-novel⁹ and *anime* about *isekai*, so it is fair to say that this series has influenced many future works. *Sword Art Online*, set in the nearby future, is about 10,000 people who get trapped within a virtual reality video game with no way to log out. However, it is revealed that dying in the video game means death in real life. Defeating the final boss or clearing all 100 floors of the game world will allow all remaining people to be freed from the program and their minds will return to the real world, giving all inhabitants a common goal and purpose. Furthermore, the protagonist, Kirito, is a former beta tester for the game and also receives a unique skill that only he possesses.¹⁰ Kirito is an example of a typical *isekai* protagonist because he not only has extra knowledge, which gives him an edge against his peers, but also has an incredibly powerful ability. *Sword Art Online* contains one of the most important characteristics of a standard *isekai* storyline: the protagonist has traits that make him stand apart from the rest. In addition, this series was strong because it was such a pioneer into popularizing the *isekai* genre and as a result

⁹ Light-novels refer to a style of Japanese novel that is aimed towards the young adult demographic. They are often shorter than a traditional novel, and include illustrations in the anime and manga art style. They can be seen as the cross between a manga and a novel.

¹⁰ Reki Kawahara.. ソードアート・オンライン [Sword Art Online]. ASCII Media Works. 2009.

set the guidelines for what a proper *isekai* should entail. However, because of the success of *Sword Art Online*, many people also saw it as an opportunity to jump on the bandwagon and create similar stories.

Other *isekai* makes use of this formula but put their own spin and flair on it. For example, Shirakome's *Arifureta: From Commonplace to World's Strongest* has characters who can look up their own status through a menu system like in gaming. They can see information like skills, level, and the values of their attack, magic, or defense.¹¹ Other series like Tsukiyo's *The Best Assassin, Incarnated into a Different World's Aristocrat* features an assassin who is reincarnated into a different world but is given powerful skills and abilities by an observing goddess.¹² Series like these, and many more, build upon the popularity that *Sword Art Online* has garnered and give their own twists on the genre. Although *Sword Art Online* jumpstarted and gave recognition to the *isekai* genre, it also caused *isekai* to snowball into the monotonous genre it is now.



Cover art for *Sword Art Online*,
Reki Kawahara

Romance Isekai

While the “standard *isekai*” focuses more on action, adventure, drama, and seeing the protagonists use their overpowering abilities, other *isekai* focus on romance. In the case of

¹¹ Ryou Shirakome 白米良. *Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou* ありふれた職業で世界最強 [Arifureta: From Commonplace to World's Strongest]. Comic Gardo. 2016.

¹² Rui Tsukiyo 月夜るい. *Sekai Saikō no Asashin, Isekai Kizoku ni Tensei Suru* 世界最高の暗殺者、異世界貴族に転生する [The Best Assassin, Incarnated into a Different World's Aristocrat]. 2019.

romance *isekai*, a special skill usually makes characters more attractive to the opposite or same sex, highlighting the importance of this trait. For most of the *isekai* that fall under this category, it is easy to see the target demographic. Most contain a male protagonist who finds himself in a new world and with new powers. In this world, however, the protagonist might set out to find as many cute girls and build himself a harem. Since different worlds have different laws as well, it would be possible to buy slaves as well. For example, in Sogano's *A Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon*, the protagonist, after attempting to commit suicide, finds himself in a new world that has monsters and magic. Although the skill he receives when entering this world is not immediately overpowered, he uses his knowledge of video games to easily traverse the world. When he visits a slave merchant, he finds a girl that he likes and makes it his goal to save up money and one day buy her.¹³ Kankitsu's *Otherworld Ruling Skill Taker: Starting a Slave Harem from Zero* is another prime example of this trope. He uses his powerful martial arts abilities to defeat his enemies and build a harem for himself in the new world.¹⁴ Stories like these allow the audience to explore experiences and scenarios that wouldn't be easily achieved in the real world. Although that may initially sound like a boon, series like the ones mentioned above may create a dangerous precedent for certain individuals. Some might give into the darkness of *isekai* and bring their fantasies into reality. Imagine you finish the last bites of your takeout meal, stash your briefcase in the closet, along with yourself into Sogano's or Kankitsu's protagonists. You begin to lose yourself in the character, gain an overblown sense of his own power, and fall into a dangerous trap, perpetuating sexism and objectification in the real world.

¹³ Shachi Sogano 蘇我捨恥. *Isekai Meikyuu De Dorei Harem wo* 異世界迷宮でハーレムを [A Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon]. Shounen Ace. 2017.

¹⁴ Yusura Kankitsu 柑橘ゆすら. *Isekai Shihai no Skill Taker: Zero kara Hajimeru Dorei Harem* 異世界支配のスキルテイカー ゼロから始める奴隷ハーレム [Otherworld Ruling Skill Taker: Starting a Slave Harem from Zero]. Suiyoubi no Sirius. 2016.

In contrast to the male-centric *isekai* stories, the rising popularity of *isekai* has resulted in authors attempting to appeal to the female audience as well. Yamaguchi's *I Reincarnated into an Otome Game as a Villainess With Only Destruction Flags...*¹⁵ sees the female protagonist get transported to an *otome* 乙女 [lit. "maiden/girl"] game that she is very familiar with.¹⁶ Instead of becoming the main female protagonist, she becomes the villainess character who is known for bullying the main character. She realizes that if she follows the game's original plotline, she will eventually die in the natural course of the story. In order to avoid that, she resolves to change her character's fate by befriending the main character. Interestingly, her actions also cause the male romantic interests to become interested in her instead of the main character.

Unknowingly, she becomes the main character herself.¹⁷

This *isekai* has gained popularity in the past year for

experimenting with the genre in a refreshing way, appealing to both female and even male

audiences. Although the premise of these series is usually quite interesting, people may be

tempted to give into the unrealistic depictions of romance presented. Although most of us know



Cover art for *I Reincarnated into an Otome Game as a Villainess With Only Destruction Flags...*, Satoru Yamaguchi

¹⁵ Having a ridiculously long title is a common trend in light novels and *manga* about *isekai*. It has become a running gag in the industry but also allows readers to instantly know the plot. The current longest title is 69 characters long, including punctuation.

¹⁶ This is a classification of video games primarily aimed towards female audiences. They usually take the form of a visual novel or life simulation games. The goal of the game is for the participant to make choices and develop a romantic relationship with one of several of the male characters. This format is popular because since there are multiple male characters to pursue relationships with, people with different tastes can enjoy it.

¹⁷ Satoru Yamaguchi 山口悟. *Otome Game no Hametsu Flag shika Nai Akuyaku Reijou ni Tensei shiteshimatta...* 乙女ゲームの破滅フラグしかない悪役令嬢に転生してしまった... [I Reincarnated into an Otome Game as a Villainess With Only Destruction Flags...]. 2015.

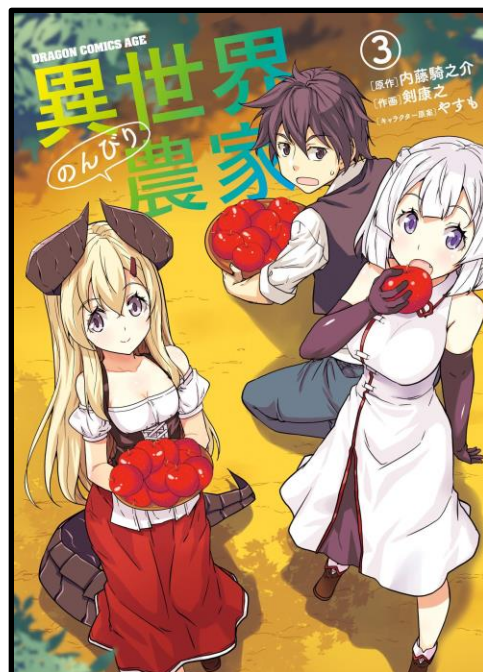
to separate fantasy from reality, especially in terms of romance and social situations, *isekai* can shift our cognitions. Maybe you have a neighbor across the street who also gets lost in these stories. Since it is so easy to insert oneself into the protagonist of an *isekai*, you might be more inclined to practice the things that you have read about. Most of the time, this might mean harmless romantic tricks to make their unrequited love notice them. But what if you took these fantasies further?

Slow Life *Isekai*

While the “standard” *isekai* are mainly focused on high intensity action and battling stronger opponents, the complete opposite form of *isekai* also exists, showing the strength and versatility of the genre. “Slow life” *isekai* is yet another classification of *isekai* that can be enjoyed by a wider audience, but is aimed at people who want to take a break and escape from their busy and exhausting lifestyles.¹⁸ Like the protagonists, the main readers of this subgenre might exhibit higher degrees of escapism. Although everyone shows escapism in some way or form, there is a line that should not be crossed. One of the major differences between this and a standard *isekai* storyline is that the characters in the new world usually have no interest in becoming a hero or adventurer. Furthermore, the skills and abilities that they receive generally do not help them with combat. Instead, they choose to take life at a slower pace and enjoy what is around them in their new world. For example, Naitou’s *Farming Life in Another World* focuses on an overworked salaryman who dies from overwork when he is 39. Before he is reincarnated to a new world, he tells the god that he wants to be a farmer and have a body that

¹⁸ The term “slow life” comes from the Japanese word *nonbiri* [のんびり] and means carefree or leisurely. In the context of *isekai*, series that usually have this word in the title focus on more laid back aspects of life, often portraying a calm and relaxing storyline.

never gets sick. When he is reincarnated to a new world, he is also given an omnipotent tool that can take whatever shape he desires, whether that be an axe, hoe, or spear. In the beginning, he uses this tool to make a home for himself and farm so that he can survive. However, he starts to gain followers from many different races and creates a village where everyone can live in peace and harmony. He aids everyone as a responsible village chief and lives a relaxing life, which stands in stark contrast to his previous one.¹⁹



Cover art for *Farming Life in Another World*, Kinosuke Naitou

On the other hand, there are many people who want to use the knowledge and skills that they have learned from their original world. Since they are armed with knowledge not familiar to the *isekai*, their actions greatly benefit those around them. For example, Takayama's *Alternate World Pharmacy* is about a pharmacologist who dies at a young age but is reincarnated as a 10-year-old boy in a new world. He uses his knowledge of modern medicine to bring new practices into the kingdom and open his own pharmacy. Although the inhabitants are initially skeptical of the new types of medicine, he soon wins over the public and creates a new age of medical discovery.²⁰ Other characters open up various types of stores that sell items unknown to that world's inhabitants. These may include a general item store, a restaurant serving modern day cuisine, or even a Japanese-style convenience store. Mitsuwa, from FUNA's *Saving 80,000 Gold*

¹⁹ Kinosuke Naitou 内藤騎之介. *Isekai Nonbiri Nouka* 異世界のんびり農家 [Farming Life in Another World]. ComicWalker. 2017.

²⁰ Liz Takayama 高山理図. *Isekai Yakkyoku* 異世界薬局 [Alternate World Pharmacy]. ComicWalker. 2016.

Coins in the Different World for My Old Age, can travel back and forth between Japan and a different world, so she uses this ability to its full extent and brings items from modern Japan to a medieval era society to sell. The items amaze the citizens and she is able to easily sell trivial items, like marbles and candy, for a lot of gold, securing an easy and relaxing life.²¹ Ichitomo's *Handyman Saitou In Another World* presents a slightly different take on this genre. An underappreciated handyman in Japan is transported to a world with magic and monsters where he teams up with a warrior, wizard, and fairy. Over there, his skills are incredibly useful for



Cover art for *Saving 80,000 Gold Coins in the Different World for My Old Age*, FUNA

safely clearing dungeons and aiding his teammates. In this new world, he is finally able to achieve a sense of purpose and feel needed, something which he did not get in Japan.²²

This trend has become more popular in *isekai* because it turns an individual's underappreciated skill set into something important in another world, making them useful. For some readers, however, this is also a dangerous thought process because it encourages them to continue learning their less useful skill sets, in hope that it will become useful one day. Another example can be seen in the previously highlighted *Farming Life in Another World*, where the protagonist is able to build an entire farm and village with his bare hands. Although he was just a normal salaryman at a Japanese company in his previous life, he somehow possesses the precise

²¹ FUNA. *Rougo ni Sonaete Isekai de 8-manmai no Kinka wo Tamemasu* 老後に備えて異世界で8万枚の金貨を貯めます [Saving 80,000 Gold Coins in the Different World for My Old Age]. Suiyoubi no Sirius. 2017.

²² Kazutomo Ichitomo 一智和智. *Benriya Saitou san, Isekai ni Iku* 便利屋斎藤さん、異世界に行く [Handyman Saitou In Another World]. 2018.

knowledge of agriculture and architecture. Most people wouldn't be able to use this knowledge on the spot, much less someone who is not specialized in the field. Series like these showcase how unrealistic the character's abilities are, which can negatively influence individuals who get too absorbed with *isekai*.

Finally, the most abundant category of slow life *isekai* has to do with food. Food is universal and is also an amazing gateway into Japanese culture and cuisine. Anyone can appreciate the feeling of sharing a country's cuisine and culture to another. These *isekai* do just that and the audience can see the reaction of people who eat Japanese food for the first time.



Cover art for *Alternate World Izakaya "Nobu,"* Natsuya Semikawa

Semikawa's *Alternate World Izakaya "Nobu"* is arguably one of the most famous food *isekai* right now. The story is about an *izakaya* 居酒屋 [lit. "Japanese-style bar/pub"] that is directly linked to an alternate world. One door leads to Japan, while the other leads to a medieval-level society. Customers who come in have a chance to taste various kinds of Japanese cuisine and wonder about the creation of complex dishes. For example, they can order dishes like *yakitori* 焼き鳥 [lit. "chicken on skewers"], Japanese Napolitan²³ pasta, and even order a draft beer. The viewer can learn about the alternate world's problem and politics

while observing the reaction to Japanese cuisine. Most patrons get surprised by the freshness of

²³ A Japanese style pasta dish made with spaghetti and ketchup-based sauce. It is considered Western cuisine with a Japanese influence.

the ingredients and the ingenuity of the ideas.²⁴ An extremely similar *isekai* is Inuzuka's *Restaurant to Another World* where customers are served Japanese-style Western cuisine. The restaurant serves a varied clientele, including beast people, fairies, dwarves, and even dragons. Since food and Japanese cuisine are so powerful, this genre can be taken in so many different directions as well. These include stories about a former office worker opening her own café in an alternate world,²⁵ a couple opening a café connected to an otherworldly train station,²⁶ or even a businessman who goes around sampling the exotic cuisine of the other world.²⁷

Hidden within all this food, however, is also a hint of nationalism since Japanese cuisine is so prominently featured in these various works. The subtle underlying tone is that Japanese cuisine is superior and that it is up to these Japanese nationals to spread their culture to societies that have not yet experienced it. The characters who get transported to another world often talk about how the food is bland or are saddened at the lack of innovation in their new world. Once they introduce new recipes or present new ideas to make life more comfortable, they are instantly lauded and praised for their abilities. This is most likely not the intention of the authors to portray themes like this, but it is something interesting to keep in mind. Again, because of characteristics like these, the *isekai* genre is dangerous and could lead to escalating thoughts.

²⁴ Natsuya Semikawa 蟬川夏哉. *Isekai Izakaya "Nobu"* 異世界居酒屋「のぶ」 [Alternate World Izakaya "Nobu"]. Takarajimasha. 2014.

²⁵ Ringo Amasawa 甘沢林檎. *Isekai de Cafe wo Kaiten Shimashita* 異世界でカフェを開店しました [I Opened Up A Cafe In A Different World]. AlphaPolis Web Manga. 2014.

²⁶ Yuyu Kanna 神名ゆゆ. *Isekai Ekisha no Kissaten* 異世界駅舎の喫茶店 [The Coffee Shop in a Different World Train Station]. 2018.

²⁷ Kouta Amana 天那光汰. *Gensou Gourmet* 幻想グルメ [Gourmet in Different World]. Gangan Online. 2016.

Outlier Isekai

Along with these major types of *isekai*, there is a final genre that, on one hand, incorporates crazy stories that draw from multiple aspects of the other genres, and, on the other hand, takes nothing from the previously established mold and heads in complete opposite directions. Like with any other genre, creators must constantly innovate and surprise consumers so that they stay interested. In a way, this is healthy for the genre because it means that there is an established interest in these stories from both the creators and audience. However, the authors also have to constantly create more and more ridiculous situations to make their work stand out from the rest. This results in very interesting *isekai* works that keep the genre fresh and vital. In the past few years, this style has become one of the most popular and interesting ways to view the *isekai* genre, both from the perspective of the audience and the authors. The authors get to loosely use the basic rules of an *isekai* setting, allowing them to run wild with their imagination and create fresh stories. As a result, the audience can also enjoy a wider variety of works that use the basic rules of the classics they know and love, but taken to an even higher degree of creative freedom.

A style of *isekai* that is becoming more popular is about stories that deal with revenge and having a second chance at life. Both Ononata's *The Strongest Hero Who Wants Revenge With the Power of Darkness*²⁸ and Kizuka's *The Hero is Walking the Second Time on the Path of Vengeance While Laughing*²⁹ feature protagonists who actually save the world and end up defeating the demon king. They accomplish the ultimate goal that they were tasked with and

²⁸ Manimani Ononata 斧名田 マニマニ. *Fukushuu o Koinegau Saikyou Yuusha wa, Yami no Chikara de Senmetsu Musou Suru* 復讐を希う最強勇者は、闇の力で殲滅無双する [The Strongest Hero Who Wants Revenge With the Power of Darkness]. Suiyoubi wa Mattari Dash X Comic. 2019.

²⁹ Nero Kizuka 木塚ネロ. *Nidome no Yuusha wa Fukushuu no Michi wo Warai Ayumu* 二度目の勇者は復讐の道を嗤い歩む [The Hero is Walking the Second Time on the Path of Vengeance While Laughing]. ComicWalker. 2018.



Cover art for *The Strongest Hero Who Wants Revenge With the Power of Darkness*, Manimani Ononata

should be going back to their original world. However, in the end, they are betrayed and killed, usually by royalty and friends who they had trusted. As an act of pity, mercy, or both, the gods and goddesses resurrect the murdered hero and allow them to keep all of their skills, power level and send them back in time to the moment they were first summoned. With a second chance and a better understanding of their own powers and events to come, the protagonists go on a vengeful killing spree against their enemies. These certain *isekai* are gruesome and usually end up with a lot of bloodshed, which appeals to a mature audience.

Another interesting trend is having a human reincarnated into a non-human creature. The incredibly popular *That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime* is about a man who gets murdered one night and is reincarnated in another world. Instead of staying human, he is instead reincarnated as a slime creature.³⁰ He uses his powers to gain followers and creates a village, full of different races like orcs, goblins, dwarves, where there is no prejudice against race.³¹ In contrast, there are more lighthearted works - specifically, *isekai* where the main character is reincarnated as a cat and works to protect his new master.³²

³⁰ A common enemy in Japanese adventure games that takes the shape of a clear jelly-like creature. Usually considered one of the weakest enemies.

³¹ Fuse 伏瀬. *Tensei Shitara Slime Datta Ken* 転生したらスライムだった件 [That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime]. Shounen Sirius. 2015.

³² Nozomi Ginyoku 銀翼のぞみ. *S-Rank Monster no Behemoth Dakedo, Neko to Machigawarete Erufu Musume no Kishi (Pet) Toshite Kurashitemasu* S ランクモンスターの《ベヒーモス》だけど、猫と間違われてエルフ娘の騎士(ペット)として暮らしてます [I'm an S-Rank "Behemoth" Monster, but I'm Living as a Knight (Pet) of an Elf Girl]. Young Animal. 2018.

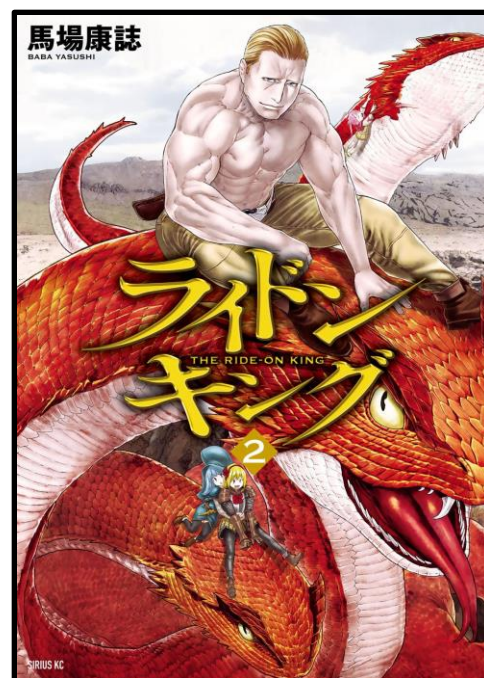
Sometimes, the protagonist doesn't get transported to an entirely new world. Instead, someone from another world is transported to modern day Japan, reversing the established pattern. For example, an elf could be introduced to the modern and technological wonders of Tokyo, eat a crepe at the top of the Tokyo Sky Tree, and maybe bring back items to their home world.³³ Series like this also bring duality to the concept of the audience inserting themselves into the shoes of the protagonists. Not only can Japanese people insert themselves into the role of the protagonist that brings the elf to Japan, but foreigners can also insert themselves into the role of the elf. Foreigners who are unfamiliar with Japanese culture and society might view Japan through the same lens as the elf, turning series like these into a sort of guidebook. The problematic aspect of lighthearted series like these is that it may affect the perception of Japan by international audiences. A false and picturesque image of Japan are presented in works like these, which can misinform foreigners learning about Japanese society and culture.

Other series make fun of the genre and present stories where the protagonist doesn't receive a unique skill and has to survive with his own power. *Konosuba: God's Blessing on this Wonderful World* highlights the realities of a person who is transported to another world. In contrast to other series where the protagonist is essentially given a free ride to fame and fortune, they have to work and hunt monsters everyday so that they can afford to eat. In the beginning, they don't even have a place to sleep, so they have to stay at a horse stable and make a bed out of

³³ Suzuki Makishima まきしま鈴木. *Nihon e Youkoso Elf-san* 日本へようこそエルフさん [Welcome to Japan, Elf-san]. Comic Fire. 2018.

hay.³⁴ Although this series is not meant to be taken seriously, it is still important to see what aspects the genre has explored.

Possibly one of the most unique *isekai* stories out there, Baba's *The Ride-On King* is about a man named Alexander Purchinov who is in charge of the Republic of Pursia, an obvious reference to Vladimir Putin.³⁵ The character has a desire to “tame and ride” everything, but has already ridden everything in this world, including machines, creatures, and even a nation. He dies as a result of a terrorist attack and is summoned to a different world. In this world of monsters and magic, he finds out that there are so many new beings to “ride on,” instilling him with a new sense of purpose and doing whatever he can to ride new creatures and contraptions. *Isekai* like this one, and the ones discussed previously, are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of this crazy genre. However, the success of the outlier *isekai* category is both positive and negative. Although this style has temporarily



Cover art for *The Ride-On King*,
Yasushi Baba

breathed new life into the genre, it could also mean that the *isekai* genre has reached its limits and will slowly fade out of popularity in the coming decade, making way for a new genre to take the world by storm.

³⁴ Natsume Akatsuki 暁なつめ and Kurone Mishima 三島くろね. *Kono Subarashii Sekai ni Shukufuku wo! この素晴らしい世界に祝福を!* [KonoSuba: God's Blessing on this Wonderful World!]. Kadokawa Shoten. 2013.

³⁵ Yasushi Baba 馬場康誌. *ライドンキング* [The Ride-On King]. Shounen Sirius. 2018.

The Problems of the *Isekai* Genre

In examining these four categories of *isekai*, I have presented an overview of positives and negatives that the audience may experience. Moreover, based upon this genre examination, I have found coherent and particular properties that are important to highlight and discuss further. On the surface level, the *isekai* genre seems to be flourishing and constantly coming up with new ideas to excite readers. The genre has created many successful *isekai* light novels, resulting in many *manga* and *anime* adaptations. Ever since the early 2010s, *isekai* has had a firm grasp on the industry and the format has become incredibly commonplace. Chances are, one will eventually be able to find an *isekai* that piques their interests. There is no doubt that a lot of positive light has been shed on the genre. Yet underneath all of the good that *isekai* has done for the industry, there are many problems associated with the popularity of the *isekai* genre, resulting in darker elements if one chooses to look more closely.³⁶

The first problem is linked to characters who are reincarnated into a different world. There is a definite trend in what types of characters get a second chance at life. The protagonists are usually NEET's³⁷, *hikikomori*'s 引きこもり (lit. “shut-in”), suicides or murder victims, and overworked salarymen suffering at the hands of Japanese business culture. This group of people can be considered the outcasts of Japanese society, all of whom live a relatively unsatisfied life. Although the *isekai* genre can be enjoyed by anyone, there is a very specific audience being targeted here, which makes the popularity of the genre frightening. The protagonist of the previously discussed *Farming Life in Another World* was an ordinary salaryman who neglected his health and worked himself to death.³⁸ Subaru, the protagonist of *Re:Zero - Starting Life in*

³⁶ For this section, I will refer back to previously mentioned works.

³⁷ Japanese acronym for describing a person who is “Not in Education, Employment, or Training.”

³⁸ Kinosuke Naitou 内藤騎之介. *Isekai Nonbiri Nouka* 異世界のんびり農家 [Farming Life in Another World]. ComicWalker. 2017.

Another World, is a shut-in NEET who finds himself in a new world.³⁹ *KonoSuba: God's Blessing on this Wonderful World!* features yet another *hikikomori* whose traits of isolating himself frequently appear in his new world.⁴⁰ There are many people in Japan who are unsatisfied with their current lifestyle but lack the means to change themselves or their current occupation. Instead, they continue with their static lifestyle but try to find avenues of escape. *Isekai* is the perfect escapist model and allows people to live out their fantasies and distract themselves from real life, if only for moments. The characters mentioned above are all in similar situations where they have reached a dead end, either with their life or motivation, and have resigned themselves to suffering for the remainder of their lives. However, *isekai* “saves” these individuals and gives them a second lease on life, allowing them to better themselves and also achieve goals that wouldn’t have been possible in their previous lives. The targeted audience here wishes that they had a second chance in life so that they can live things differently. You are one of these people. If armed with the knowledge from your previous life, you know that they can live a more fulfilling lifestyle. You could quit your grueling job, open up your dream restaurant, or find romance. However, the problem here is that you and others might become too reliant on this way of thinking. For individuals who have given up on their current life and status, they may become fixated on the idea of *isekai* and avoid fixing their current problems. Since they might assume they have another chance at life, they will instead run away from their problems, creating issues for themselves and the ones surrounding them.

Furthermore, there are many *isekai* stories that make use of random pieces of information. Examples include knowing detailed wilderness survival techniques, specific

³⁹ Tappei Nagatsuki 長月達平. *Re:Zero kara Hajimeru Isekai Seikatsu* ゼロから始める異世界生活 [Re:Zero - Starting Life in Another World]. Media Factory. 2014.

⁴⁰ Natsume Akatsuki 暁なつめ and Kurone Mishima 三島くろね. *Kono Subarashii Sekai ni Shukufuku wo! この素晴らしい世界に祝福を!* [KonoSuba: God's Blessing on this Wonderful World!]. Kadokawa Shoten. 2013.

military strategies, or the knowledge to construct complex modern inventions. To some, this might seem like useless information that does not see use in the 21st century. However, since *isekai* protagonists make full use of this random information, it validates people who have spent time learning this type of knowledge. As previously explained, *Handyman Saitou In Another World* features a handyman who is reincarnated into another world. Although his skills put him at the bottom of the social ladder and made him feel relatively useless, Saitou's new world completely flips people's perception of his abilities. His skills are incredibly prized in a dangerous world where there could be traps and monsters around each corner, earning him the respect and admiration of those around him. In stark contrast to Saitou's previous world, his *isekai* is the perfect fit for him and validates the skills he possesses and his meaning in life.⁴¹

Another example can be seen in Onshin's *The Villainess Will Crush Her Destruction End Through Modern Firepower*, where the main character is a first-year college student studying humanities who is a fanatic about owning and shooting guns. She would collect model guns in Japan, a country with strict gun laws, and would make travel plans to go shooting in Guam.⁴² She is so committed to her gun hobby that her apartment lacks bare necessities and is littered with trash bags all over the floor. Her fanaticism for her unique hobby makes her suffer in Japan, but when she is reincarnated into a new world, it all changes. She discovers magic, which allows her to create and shoot guns, giving her access to the fantasy that she always dreamed about. Stories like these demonstrate how nonsensical skills and hobbies are often completely justified in the

⁴¹ Kazutomo Ichitomo 一智和智. *Benriya Saitou san, Isekai ni Iku* 便利屋斎藤さん、異世界に行く [Handyman Saitou In Another World]. 2018.

⁴² Futsuu Onshin 園心ふつう and Dai-616 Tokubetsu Jouhou Daitai 第 616 特別情報大隊. Doushitemo Hametsu Shitakunai Akuyaku Reijou ga Gendai Heiki wo Tenishita Kekka ga Kore desu どうしても破滅したくない悪役令嬢が現代兵器を手にした結果がこれです [The Villainess Will Crush Her Destruction End Through Modern Firepower]. *Suiyoubi no Sirius*. 2019.

new world, making people believe that they did not waste their time and previous lives on a useless skill.

Yet another major problem is how almost every single *isekai* gives the protagonist a special ability or skill. Kirito in *Sword Art Online* is able to wield two swords, a feat impossible for everyone else.⁴³ Machio in *Farming Life in Another World* is given an omnipotent tool that can transform into anything that only he possesses.⁴⁴ Tuatha in *The Best Assassin, Incarnated into a Different World's Aristocrat* is given skills, which only he has, that let him grow stronger and faster than anyone around him.⁴⁵ It's obvious to see what the running trend here is. All these protagonists are given skills, abilities, and weapons that distinguish themselves from the rest of society, allowing them to feel like a one of a kind being. To explain why this can be problematic, especially when referring to Japanese society and culture, it is important to understand the differences between Eastern and Western perspectives. Japan has a collectivistic culture by Western standards, which makes it harder for some Japanese to distinguish themselves from the rest of the pack. It is easy to get lost in the crowd and just resign oneself to becoming another gear in the machine. It is within human nature to feel special and important, so *isekai* gives people an opportunity to experience this. By receiving skills and abilities that set characters apart from the rest, viewers can feel special and needed. They get to be the star of the show and not get overshadowed by others. Although it is not a problem to be part of a collectivistic society or thought, it makes it easier for one to feel the need to differentiate themselves. An individualistic society does not necessarily mean the perfect solution either. In such societies, people may feel

⁴³ Reki Kawahara.. ソードアート・オンライン [Sword Art Online]. ASCII Media Works. 2009.

⁴⁴ Kinosuke Naitou 内藤騎之介. *Isekai Nonbiri Nouka* 異世界のんびり農家 [Farming Life in Another World]. ComicWalker. 2017.

⁴⁵ Rui Tsukiyo 月夜るい. *Sekai Saikō no Asashin, Isekai Kizoku ni Tensei Suru* 世界最高の暗殺者、異世界貴族に転生する [The Best Assassin, Incarnated into a Different World's Aristocrat]. 2019.

compelled to constantly one up their peers to gain any sense of fame or notoriety. The *isekai* genre is just well suited for collectivistic societies and can flourish by preying on a specific mindset.

Finally, another problem of *isekai* is the character design of many of the main protagonists, before and after they reach their new world. Some series choose to keep the appearance of the protagonist the same as their previous life. In these cases, the protagonist will most likely resemble the average Japanese male or female. They will have an average build, black hair, and not too many distinguishing features. Every single series mentioned earlier, with the obvious exception of the Vladimir Putin lookalike, exhibit these distinguishing characteristics commonly seen in Japanese males and females. With designs like these, the viewer, who is assumed to be Japanese, can easily relate with the character and project themselves in the shoes of the main character. They can feel like they are the ones living a new life full of new experiences. In a lot of cases, the faces of the characters in their original world aren't even shown, making it even easier for the audience to step into the shoes of the protagonists. On the other hand, some series choose to change the appearance of the protagonist completely and give them an objectively beautiful and perfect body in the different world.⁴⁶

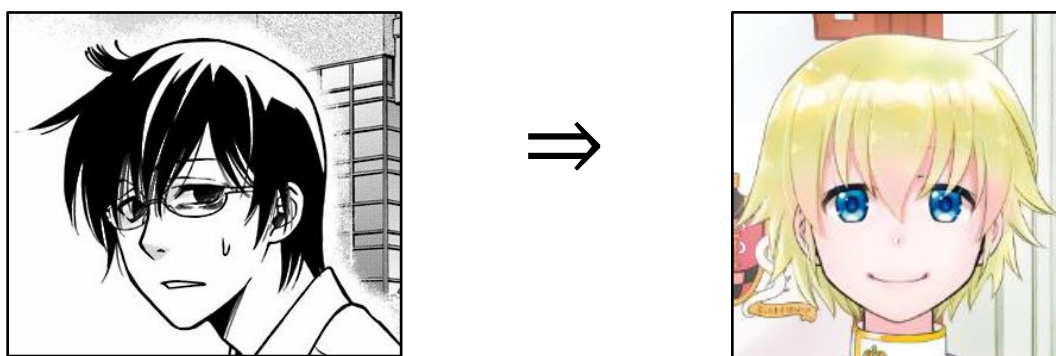


Illustration of protagonist before and after in *Alternate World Pharmacy*, Takayama Liz

⁴⁶ Liz Takayama 高山理図. *Isekai Yakkyoku* 異世界薬局 [Alternate World Pharmacy]. ComicWalker. 2016.

Those who are unhappy with the way they look in the real world can feel beautiful and popular in the other world. This creates a dangerous perspective of their view regarding their own beauty and self-confidence. Some may take more drastic measures, like extensive plastic surgery, to correct their appearances to *isekai* protagonists. These traits are also dangerous because people may become too invested in certain stories and believe that they are the main character. Although getting absorbed in a storyline does not immediately sound like a bad thing, there may be some who take this self-insertion to a dangerous degree, chasing after a degree of beauty that cannot be found in the real world.

Although escapism might initially sound like a bad concept, escapism is an integral part in maintaining the mental wellbeing of an individual. Arguably, everyone in this world exhibits a form of escapism in their daily lives, albeit at varying levels. Individuals may be suffering from stressful work conditions, unsatisfying relationships with their family and friends, or may be trying to forget about a pandemic affecting the world. Everyone has different avenues of escape, and there are those like Anime Corps who believe that it is unavoidable, especially in a digital age.⁴⁷ Books, movies, recreational activities, games, and even Japanese *anime* and *manga* are all forms of escapism that people enjoy. However, the varying degrees that an individual may indulge in escapism is important when viewing Japan through the lens of *isekai*. Japan's NEET and *hikikomori* are infamous examples of how escapism may be taken too far when running away from reality is easier. Escapism is something that has to be taken in moderation and one should strive not to find themselves on either side of the spectrum. Too little escapism means that one may become overwhelmed by their circumstances, causing burnout or worse. Too much escapism means that one is constantly running away from their problems, hoping that their

⁴⁷ Anime Corps. "Anime Editorial: The Bliss of Escapism." *Anime Corps*, accessed February 12, 2020. <https://animewithsky.wordpress.com/2017/04/21/anime-editorial-the-bliss-of-escapism/>.

problems will solve themselves. Finding the middle ground is an equally challenging and important endeavor in creating a balanced lifestyle.

Furthermore, escapism may be one of the reasons that explains Japan's recent trend in terms of the number of suicides. Previously, Japan was infamous for its high suicide rates. However, as seen in Figure 1 below, the suicide rate in Japan has steadily decreased ever since 2009. One possible explanation for this trend is that because of the Japanese government's intervention and policies, there are fewer "black companies,"⁴⁸ resulting in less work and stress related suicides. However, another interpretation of this downward trend is that there are more avenues of escape readily available for Japanese society to consume. This might take the form of video games, movies, books, and maybe even *isekai*. Popular media, like these examples and especially *isekai*, can help a person deal with the stress that comes with living in Japanese society, resulting in a lowered suicide rate as illustrated by Figure 1.

⁴⁸ A "black company" (ブラック企業) is a Japanese term that refers to office work companies that improperly treat their employees. Most notable characteristics are large amounts of forced overtime work without overtime pay and power harassment from superiors. These are considered the sweatshops of office work.

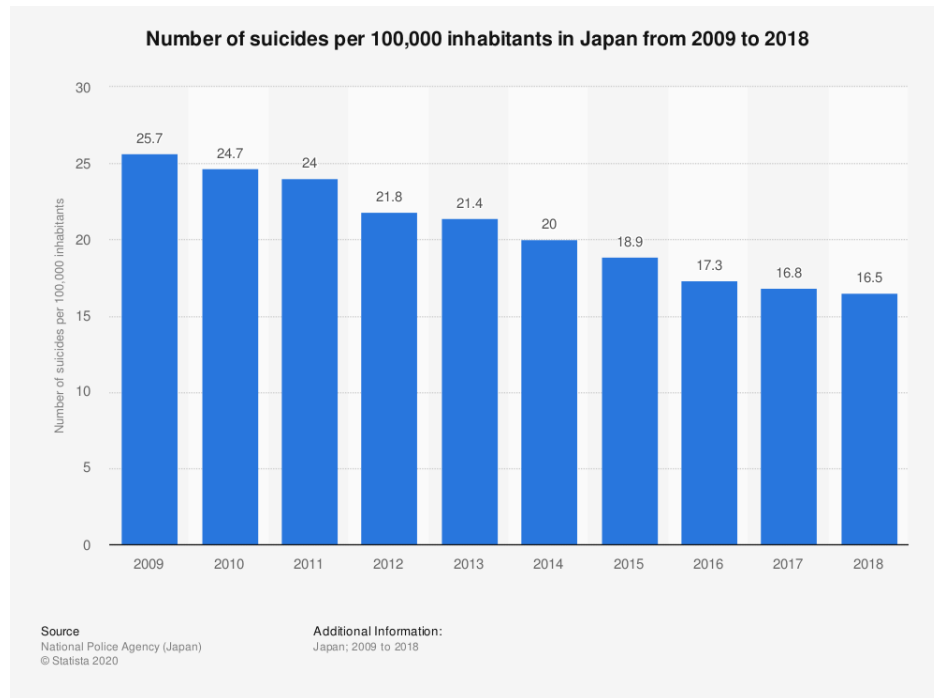


Figure 1. Source: National Police Agency (Japan). Created by Statista, March, 2017

Even though suicide rates are at a historic low, the “the number of those under 20 who took their lives rose by 60 from the previous year to 659, making them the only age group to see a rise.”⁴⁹ As always, there are a lot of factors to consider when examining statistics like these. However, the target demographic of most Japanese *anime*, *manga*, and light novels is aimed at young adults. For these young adults going through difficult times in their lives, escaping reality can be an easy and painless way of coping with stress. The *isekai* genre only exacerbates this trend and is possibly inviting more young adults to take their own lives.

Finally, the Japanese *anime*, *manga*, and light-novel industry may be in a difficult position as well. One of the biggest problems plaguing the industry right now is that there is an overabundance of *isekai* works being currently made. *Isekai* stories are relatively easy to create,

⁴⁹ Reuters, “Suicides in Japan at historic low in 2019 but more teens kill themselves.” The Japan Times, accessed April 19, 2020. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/03/18/national/social-issues/japan-suicides-historic-low-2019-teens-kill/>.

so it is easy to see why so many authors are jumping on the bandwagon. Creating an *isekai* story is a safe option for any aspiring author who wants to make a name for themselves. Chances are that their *isekai* could get popular enough and eventually get created into an *anime*.⁵⁰ Therefore, *isekai* can be considered an easy road in getting fame and recognition. The double-edged sword of the situation is that given the unrestrictive nature of *isekai*, anyone can create an *isekai*. This has created an oversaturation of the market and now there are too many series focusing on *isekai*. According to My Anime List, an online compendium of *anime* and *manga*, from 2012 to 2018, the number of *isekai* works was on average 6 series per year. However, in 2019 alone, that number jumped to 14 whole series that aired. This incredible jump illustrates how the authors, publishing studios, and animation companies are vying for a piece of the lucrative pie that is *isekai*. Meanwhile, the audience is both benefiting and suffering from the influx of *isekai*. Too much *isekai* means that the industry has become stagnant in terms of ideas and experimentation. Creating a story other than *isekai* is not worth the risk anymore. Why would an author take a risk and jeopardize their career by creating a new, and possibly unpopular, genre? Many people would rather stick with the safest option with the highest chances of success given how tough the Japanese *anime* and *manga* industry can be. Since there are so many different *isekai* stories, the works get blurred together and it is difficult for viewers to fall in love with one specific series. For many consumers of *isekai*, forgetting series and moving on to new series is commonplace.

The Power of the Japanese Visual Media and Pop Culture

Japanese visual media, especially *anime* and *manga*, have evolved dramatically ever since its inception. Popularized as a form of wartime propaganda during World War II to raise

⁵⁰ The timeline for many authors getting their works published is web novel > light novel > *manga* > *anime*.

the morale of Japanese soldiers, *anime* has profoundly affected millions. *Manga*, which has existed as early as the 12th century, has been an important medium in telling stories and allowing people to express a variety of emotions. Both Japanese *anime* and *manga* have been integral pillars in Japanese society for decades and mediums to shape minds and spread knowledge. The *isekai* genre is no exception. While this newer form can be considered one of the most beneficial genres as of late, it also is one of the most harmful. As Christopher Bolton has argued, one of the strengths of Japanese media, like *anime* and *manga*, is its unique ability to influence and manipulate what we might think. Furthermore, compared to before, *anime* and *manga* has quickly evolved from a subculture into mainstream culture. It is not a form of media that only a small portion of Japan enjoys anymore. Instead, it's reach has rapidly grown, affecting all facets of Japanese popular culture and society in addition to appealing to a great global audience. It is not uncommon to use animation simply for television shows anymore. McDonald's has used short animations in their commercials to encourage more people to work part time at locations. Lotte, a candy and snack manufacturer, also released a commercial done in *anime* style to promote their chocolate on Valentine's Day. As a result, more and more of us have been exposed to the powers and abilities that Japanese animation entails. For these reasons, the influence that Japanese animation has on Japan, and even the world, cannot be understated and may have no boundaries.

A Much Needed Reset in the Industry

The Japanese light novel, *manga*, and *anime* industry has reached a very interesting point. Since the "flavor of the month" (decade in this case) is *isekai* stories, it is difficult for authors writing about different genres to gain popularity and receive the boost that they desperately need.

Furthermore, Japanese *anime* and *manga* have exploded in popularity in the past decade with no signs of slowing down. More people from across the world are gaining a heightened awareness of Japan and its cultural and social impact in modern times. While Japanese *anime* and *manga* may have been viewed in a different lens before, it is now, without a doubt, an important part in showcasing both the good and bad in Japanese society. As shown through *isekai*, *anime* and *manga* can act as a lens into what a portion of Japanese society is currently feeling. While *isekai* can encourage artistic freedom and provide some healthy and harmless outlets of escape, it also poses various dangers. Those who get lost in these characters and worlds may lose sight of their real-life responsibilities, become isolated, exhibit sexist and other problematic behaviors, detach from their own feelings and become isolated from family and friends. No matter how one sees *isekai*, it is an effective gauge to measure where the culture is headed, what themes engage viewers. Its widespread appeal and complex impact make it an indispensable tool for future research. Hopefully by the end of the decade, a new genre will become popular and bring a breath of fresh air to the industry. It might just be time for the *isekai* genre to get a taste of its own medicine and wake up in a different world.

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